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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [MARR](#) [IZ](#) [RO](#)
SUBJECT: PNL LAUNCHES PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE TO WITHDRAW
ROMANIAN FORCES FROM IRAQ

Classified By: Polcouns Theodore Tanoue for 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Liberal Party (PNL) legislators, led by former Defense Minister Teodor Atanasiu and Senator Norica Nicolai opened a new front in the current political war by announcing at a press conference February 21 that they will launch a debate in Parliament on withdrawing Romanian troops from Iraq. Atanasiu said that he would also introduce a bill to rewrite existing legislation in order to give to Parliament the authorities now given to the Supreme Defense Council in deciding on the deployment or withdrawal of Romanian armed forces abroad. PNL Senator (and Secretary of the Senate Defense Committee) George Scutaru, a close associate of Atanasiu, subsequently told Embassy that the proposed bill would likely be ready for introduction in "two or three weeks' time".

¶2. (C) In a telephone discussion with Polcouns February 22, Mihnea Constantinescu, a senior advisor to Prime Minister Tariceanu, underscored that the move to reopen debate on troop deployments should be viewed as part of the ongoing domestic political "noise", and not a shift in official Romanian government policy. He noted that the PNL had initiated a nationwide petition campaign against Iraqi troop deployments last fall, and the move to escalate the debate on the issue was an obvious attempt to capitalize on the recent UK decision to begin drawing down British forces in Iraq. (Note: the PNL claims it has gathered over a million signatures in the petition campaign.) Constantinescu also drew parallels between the parliamentary debate in Romania and the recent nonbinding resolution in the U.S. Congress. He added that Atanasiu had "no credibility" as a spokesman for official Romanian policy, and expressed skepticism that the proposal to empower parliament to withdraw military forces from abroad would succeed. No branch of government willingly cedes authority to another, he said.

¶3. (C) Constantinescu acknowledged that the heated political rhetoric now being exchanged by all sides in Romania was viewed by some observers abroad as an indication of potential domestic instability. He said that he had just received a report from the Romanian NATO Permrep, Ambassador Ducaru, that NATO colleagues had expressed concern about the increasing acrimony of the domestic political debate. Constantinescu reiterated the need for the Embassy and other foreign observers to differentiate between tough political language intended for domestic consumption and official government policy. Despite the unprecedented levels of political "noise" right now, the institutions of governance in Romania were still working, he said. On the troop withdrawal issue, he promised that the Prime Minister's office would "try to play it down."

¶4. (C) Constantinescu called back later to report that he had just spoken with Prime Minister Tariceanu (who is

currently visiting Tokyo). He said the Prime Minister had reconfirmed the points that Constantinescu had provided us earlier, including: 1) the parliamentary debate was not reflection of official GOR policy; and 2) the PM's office will "play down" the issue. GOR Secretary General (and PNL parliamentarian) Radu Stroe subsequently issued a public statement that stressed the desire to effect a "gradual withdrawal in conformance with a timetable agreed to jointly with our partners."

¶5. (C) Other Embassy contacts, including Defense Minister Frunzaverde and Presidential Office senior National Security Advisor Medarmade the point that there has been no/no change in current GOR policy on troop deployments in Iraq. Medar assured the Ambassador that no decision would be taken without close consultations with all. He said that President Basescu would be returning later this afternoon from a visit to Egypt and would be expecting a call from the Ambassador. We will report Basescu's comments separately.

¶6. (C) Comment: As Constantinescu noted, authorities including the Prime Minister will be loath to cede to Parliament the power to control Romanian troop deployments abroad, and we remain skeptical that Atanasiu's proposed law will succeed. Rather, the PNL move appears to be driven by the desire to put President Basescu on the spot by forcing him to either back down on Romania's troop commitments in Iraq, or to defend an unpopular decision before the public and the Parliament. Either way, it forces Basescu to expend valuable political capital when it is a dwindling asset. End Comment.
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